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AUTHOR Keedy, John L.
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ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings of a case study of 4 first-year superintendents, which comprised part of a national study of 18 superintendents conducted from 1992-94. Data were collected from interviews, observation, and document analysis. All four superintendents had agendas focused on improving services for children. Three superintendents with the right fit to district context had clear, personal theories of practice, which provided predictable actions. The strategies used by one superintendent to implement his school vision are described in detail--how he supported and modeled collaborative interaction patterns with teachers and principals, and educated the public. Factors for his success included his central-office experience, facilitative leadership style, a commitment to personal intellectual and professional development, and a shift from a unilateral structure-setting agenda to a consideration of structure, curriculum, and student work. Appendices contain a memo from the superintendent to school staff. (Contains 17 references.) (LMI)

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Synopsis of
The First-Year Superintendency:
An Across-Case Analysis, and

Don Drake: Culture-Builder and Change Agent
(One of Four Cases in the above Study)

John L. Keedy
North Carolina State University

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Overview of This Paper

In this paper I do two things. First, I provide a synopsis of the across-case study of four first-year superintendents. Second, I describe one of these cases: that of Don Drake. In the roundtable session, the three other cases are Kathleen Connor, Susan Oliver, and Phil Eugene.

Importance and Purpose of This Study

The four researchers participating in this roundtable are part of a team of twelve researchers who studied a representative, national sample of 18 first-year superintendents from 1992-1994 . First-year superintendents were chosen for two reasons. First, we have learned that the superintendency is far more specialized and complex role than when most current senior superintendents entered the field 15 years ago (Glass, 1994). Add the national pressure for school reform to this mix, and we can presume that how these superintendents do in their first job--and even in their first year--may determine how they view their career as superintendents.

Second, the job performance of superintendents will be critical to 21st century schooling. Yet observers (e.g., Bennett, 1991; Kerr, 1988) have identified rapid superintendent turnover as a significant deterrent to long-range school improvement. So we need to began profiling the performance of beginning superintendents since these people will furnish a sizable portion of the upper-level leadership in U.S. schools (Glass, 1994). We can use study findings to improve preparation programs specifically for superintendents. Indeed, much of the post-1983 revision in education administration has focused on principal, not superintendent, preparation (see recent issues of The UCEA Review).

Conceptual Framework

We modified the "person/context/reform" conceptual frame of Johnson & Verre (1993) in reducing the framework to interaction between each superintendent's agenda (what she stands for and intends to do) on the one hand and the district context on the other. Since successful leaders lead out from their own ideas about caring, student-oriented practice (cf. Beck, 1994) as

opposed to following the prescriptions of others (Sergiovanni, 1992), agendas presumably should be grounded within superintendents' professional's beliefs and experiences. Superintendents unable to articulate and substantiate their intentions to others, will encounter overwhelming difficulties in their first year.

Researchers are becoming increasingly aware of the profound influence of organizational context on school practice in general: "The context in which educational change is pursued is everything" (Lieberman & McLaughlin, cited by Darling-Hammond, 1993, p. 762; cf., Bolman, 1993). Personal agendas and context, presumably, influence each other (e.g., good leaders are influenced both by other peoples' ideas and by a district's history). When there is a good fit between agendas and context, superintendents can be successful movers in school reform. When there is a poor fit between agenda and context, the most creative ideas in the world are doomed to failure (cf. Moore & Johnson, 1993).

Method

Selection of Sample

Beginning superintendents were chosen for two reasons. First, we have learned that the superintendency is far more specialized and complex role than when most current senior superintendents entered the field 15 years ago (Glass, 1994). Add the national pressure for school reform to this mix, and we can presume that how these superintendents do in their first job--and even in their first year--may determine how they view their career as superintendents.

The 18 first-year superintendents in the national study were chosen through purposeful sampling to approximate the superintendency in gender, ethnicity, district size, location, and socioeconomic status. The four superintendents chosen for this collection of papers are: Don Drake (white from rural-small town district); Kathleen Connor (white from a large suburban district); Fred (Black from a suburban district); and Susan Oliver (Black from a city district)

Data Collection

Data were collected through interview (an average of 12 one-hour, per subject), "shadowing" and recording of events as these superintendents interacted with school personnel and constituents, perusal of documents (e.g., board minutes, newspaper articles, memoranda), and Change Style Facilitator Inventory results.

Analysis

The researchers used conversation interview and further data collection in making their assertions as constant, comparative analysis. Themes explaining the fit between agenda and context emerging from the data were validated by the four superintendents. In using constant, comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), explanations for the "fit" between superintendent agenda and organization context were made. The investigators then used the multi-case study design (Yin, 1984) in which case themes are contrasted in providing theme development.

Synopses of Four Cases

(Researcher names in parentheses)

Susan Oliver (Carolyn Chapman Hughes)

In serving more than 70,000 students (of whom 70% were Black with a 50% graduation rate), Susan Oliver's major metropolitan urban district (Renfield City) had faced dramatically reduced economic resources because of middle class flight following court-ordered desegregation. Current business and civic leaders, however, recognized that school improvement was vital to their vision of city renaissance, including a $5 billion downtown construction project. Strong mayoral leadership resulted a "reform slate" election of four members to the seven-member school board (Fall/ 1992). Political discord, however, has long characterized the Board of Education: Oliver was the ninth superintendent (7/01/93) in 16 years. So Oliver conducted briefings with various publics to identify the immediate challenge: gaining federal court permission to change the bussing plan by proposing educational initiatives.

In early August, the federal judge approved her plan "[which] won me credibility in the broader community." Oliver soon

realized that ultimately she must inspire district employees to believe in themselves and to be "proud to work for Renfield schools, because they've been bashed about by the press." She used a sincere, down-to-earth "people" strategies in conducting a school-year opening breakfast for all district teachers, in planning the public forums and live telecasts for the presentation of the long-range comprehensive action plan, and in organizing community work teams to redesign their education system. "I'm taking more risks than the [work] teams themselves. We will shift our priorities from remediation to prevention of early school failure." The board's six-to-one approval of the comprehensive action plan indicated a successful reform year for Oliver.

Kathleen Connor (Ira Bogotch)

Having worked her way up the career ladder in Madison, a huge, diverse, white-flight, Southern-Catholic suburb of 7,000 employees, Ms. Connor had a good working relationship with 8 of the 9 board members. Yet she was vulnerable politically because: 1) many entrenched central office bureaucrats resented her move up through the ranks to CEO; 2) her socio-political change agenda threatened the board members for whom re-election, not reform, was primary; and 3) she was trapped between conservative constituents demanding "basic education" and those wanting more social assistance programs to meet needs of "at risk" students. So there was little consensus on the "change and improvement" so vehemently demanded by most district players. Strategically, her power base was ideological (i.e., marshaling support from parents by making them realize that "...we must work together and turn the vulnerability of our children into a strength").

Viewed by informants as a hard worker and "winner," Connor also networked, spent considerably TV and personal time discussing education issues with constituents, and built a business-government-schools coalition (e.g., developing data processing, library, recreation infrastructures) to gain support for her "social" agenda. Condor's reform strategies ultimately doomed her. Her consistent advocating to all constituents that she cared

deeply about all students was a paradox of caring leadership that made her vulnerable in interpersonal relationships. Connor resigned effective July 1, 1994.

Don Drake (John Keedy)

having served as an area superintendent for a large metropolitan district with a nationally recognized site-based management program, accepted the superintendency of Richmond County Public Schools (6100 pupils with 45% minority and 55% free/reduced lunch) largely because of the seven-member board commitment to improving the local schools and not to micro-management. This regional retail-service center also had economic growth potential, and hence there was business pressure (and support) to help schools produce students with analytic and decision-making skills.

These advantages (board commitment, economic growth, and extensive administrative experience) helped Drake implement his two-part vision. First, Drake had learned from his previous administrative experience that schools cannot change unilaterally; they need external pressure from their customers (parents, students) to change and improve. Teachers and principals, through exchange of views with community leaders, must be the major players in school organization redesign. Building on the momentum established by the Outcomes-Based Education project, Drake set up town forums in which teachers, parents, and business leaders developed exit outcomes as a community-school partnership. Second, influenced by organization change theorists (e.g., Sarason), Drake also advocated that unless workplace cultures are changed, academic programs became cyclical because conditions have not first been institutionalized for change and improvement. Central office administrators, principals and teachers should make most decisions, for which they then could be made accountable.

Phil Eugene (Fred Banks)

Eugene became the first Black to serve as superintendent in this midwestern, suburban community of 4,500 students nearly all

minority. The proactive majority of the Board of Education, dissatisfied with past neglect and mismanagement, wanted reorganization and change in this district in which only 52% of its students were enrolled in college preparatory programs. Achievement and ACT tests had continued to decline. Violence and gang activity hindered teacher and administrative efforts to provide safe and orderly learning environments. Eugene, hired because of his 18 years of administrative experience, high ethical character, and ability to work with district personnel, parents, and community leaders, set out to make a difference in working with Black students not performing to satisfactory achievement levels. Eugene complemented this professional mission with a highly-principled, student-oriented philosophy in which authority, decision making, implementation, and accountability devolved to school-sites. Having conducted interviews and meetings with key community leaders to learn about the district, he formulated a Management Transition Plan (adopted by the board) to: 1) get others involved with decision making in bringing about needed changes, 2) develop an integrated administrative, planning team, and 3) coordinate curricular objectives as a framework for student knowledge and skills.

Across-Case Analysis and Discussion

All four superintendents had agendas focused on improving services for children. Yet the district context "fit" was conducive for only three superintendents to implement their agendas. Drake, Oliver, and Eugene developed strategies dovetailing with district needs as perceived by their respective boards. The proactive board (which enjoyed solid support of its business and citizen groups) supported Drake's twin visions of community identification of student outcomes and school-level empowerment. Drake and board members even conducted tours of restructured work places to convince its citizens that students needed to graduate with analytic skills. Oliver's agenda to professionalize the district staff through autonomous work teams and to conduct public forums in garnering political support co-opted board and community efforts to revitalize the downtown area.

Reform-minded board members and other city leaders also appeared dependent on Oliver to gain federal judge approval of a new bussing plan through educational initiatives.

Eugene's collaborative and managerial talents as a principled administrator were needed by a district long characterized by neglect and mismanagement resulting in declining student performance and violence. Drastic measures were needed, and only through intense community involvement and school-site autonomy buttressed by a superintendent's strong, moral leadership could this district "be turned around." Connor enjoyed initial board support in this white-flight, large suburban district, and was able to get a sales referendum passed. But when she pressed her "social" reform agenda (e.g., more social workers and counselors, in-school suspension program), she aggravated the ideological split among her politically hostile constituents (i.e., traditional academic vs. equity), and lost her already-tentative power base. Connor's agenda not only failed to intermesh with her board's agenda, but even further aggravated the deep-seated ideological split within her community. Little board leadership (i.e., attempts to find some common ground between ideological camps) emerges from the Connor case data.

Drake (external pressure needed for school change), Oliver (shift from remediation to early prevention of student failure), and Eugene (mission to improve Black student academic performance) all had agendas seemingly grounded in personal and professional belief systems. They could substantiate their student-centered positions to board and community members. Connor's strategies, on the other hand, appear grounded more with government-school-business collaboration than with genuine student improvement. As such, she could provide little common ground in helping her board deal with the community ideological split.

What emerges from this analysis is the observation that the three superintendents with the right fit with district context had clear, personal theories of practice from which to operate. Such personal theories provided consistent, predictable actions taken by these superintendents. Such consistency in actions logically

promotes a common ground for board support particularly needed by first-year superintendents just to survive. Without such a personal theory providing predictable actions (as in the case of Connor), a poor fit with district context can only worsen.

Having provided an overview of the entire study, I now proceed to one of the four cases as a separate paper.

Don Drake: Culture-Builder and Change Agent

> We need to shift our thinking about what it means to be a strong superintendent...Superintendents need to pay more attention to the heroic dimensions of leadership if they are to promote local autonomy and professionalism. Superintendents must not only have personal vision, but they must also work with others to develop a shared vision and to find a common ground; they must not only have answers, but also ask the right questions; they must not only persuade, but also listen carefully and consult widely before making decisions; they must not only wield power, but also depend upon others and develop caring relationships....In this view, the real heroes are not only the highly visible superintendents at the top but the less visible professionals and parents throughout the system who work directly with students. (Murphy, 1989, p. 810)

Don Drake represents such a "new breed" superintendent. As demonstrated below, the themes of change agent and culture builder related to the visions Don had formed about new directions for schooling in his district. His understandings about organization change, the use of power, working with the public, and modeling collaborative interactions for principals and teachers grounded his administrative actions in a new definition of "strong superintendent": that of revitalizing schools for student academic, civic, and economic success.

In this paper, I first describe the person and district before enumerating the contextual advantages for this first-year superintendent. Second, I analyze his managerial challenges and third, provide an account of the development of his twin visions for school improvement and the strategies and tactics used to begin implementing these visions.

Don Drake: The Person

Don Drake, a forty-seven year old white, resettled in another East coast state after graduating from a liberal arts college with a degree in German. He taught German for three years at a large, metropolitan district before entering administration as an assistant principal (seven years), middle school principal (one year), and high school principal (seven years). In 1985 he became an area superintendent, and for one year acting deputy superintendent.

Drake is married to an elementary teacher whom he met after college; they have two boys, aged 14 and 17. He has a masters and doctorate in education administration (a field-based, cohort program) from a major state university. For his dissertation he studied "mentors" within a career ladder program.

The District

Rural Richmond County (population: 34,000 people) had economic growth potential: large farms, a sizable Coast Guard base, a regional university (enrollment: 2300) and a community college, and plans for a large prison. The county seat (population: 14,000) served as a regional, service center. Richmond County Public Schools (RCPS) had 6200 pupils (45% minority and 55% free/reduced lunch). Its 350 teachers and 109 classified employees worked in 1 high school, 1 junior high school, and 8 elementary schools. Two assistant superintendents (instruction and administration) and 13 other administrators comprised the central office. The district recently spent 20 million dollars on capital improvements. (Don later realized that the district needed an additional 20 million dollars to renovate older buildings.)

The seven-member school board were all professionals (a pediatrician, engineer, computer specialist, community college instructor, English professor at the local university, and a housewife, business woman) with a shared mission for school change and improvement. Soon after Don began his superintendency, RCPS received a state grant to pilot outcomes-based education. (The proposal had been written previous to Drake's appointment but

merely hearing about the grant proposal during his interviewing at RCPS accounted for one piece of an ever-forming puzzle.) RCPS was a small district on the move with a supportive board for improvement in a high-growth area with a high quality of life (i.e., coastal waterways, temperate climate, industrial growth, friendly people).

Contextual Advantages Conducive to a Successful First Year

In 1991-92 Don realized that it was time to move on from a district in which he had spent 25 years. (He had had philosophical differences about management practices with the recently-appointed superintendent.) His mission was to make an impact on a school district. Don interviewed for six superintendencies within the state and received five offers. During his interview at Richmond, he laid out his gameplan to improve RCPS. The board was so impressed with his experience and expertise, that Don's biggest problem was convincing the board that he wanted the job. (Board members asked, Why leave a large, urban-suburban district to come to Richmond?) Impressed with the potential to make a difference in Richmond County ("You can't make a difference in [his former] district; it's way too big" (12/16/92). While still a candidate he spent two days studying the district. Based on that assessment, he realized that new leadership was needed at a particular school. Informally he told the RCPS board chair, "If I can't move [the current principal] out, I'm not coming" (12/16/92). In May 1992 he accepted the superintendency appointment largely because of the seven-member board commitment to changing and improving the local schools and not to micro-management.

Contextually, Don had four advantages in taking on the challenge of his first superintendency. First, his central office experience, i.e., area superintendent and one year as acting deputy superintendent, in a large, progressive metropolitan district with a nationally recognized career ladder program made his first superintendency equivalent to lateral entry. While area superintendent, he supervised more schools than when he became superintendent. Second, RCPS had a local board committed to

change and school improvement, and not to micro-management.[1] The board, after all, had really pushed to get Don to assume the position. Several board members had grown up in Richmond County and were well connected to the political-economic infrastructure. Don made sure that he tapped their expertise (several board members chaired crucial committees, e.g., finance) and continually sought their advice as he contemplated managerial moves and leadership directions for RCPS. (During this study Don was unwavering in his perception of solid board support.)

Third, RCPS was in a relatively high growth area with pressure for economic development. Such an external pressure fit in with Drake's mission as change agent. Changing and improving schools and regional economic competitiveness were inter-related: Status quo school administration was not a county-wide norm at RCPS. Fourth, the OBE grant (1993-1997) provided: 1) much-needed money for staff development and consultants, and 2) a community focus for organization change and instructional improvement. Collectively, these four advantages were to play a major role in Don's first-year leadership.

Major Managerial Challenges During Don's First Year

Don spent the first two weeks collecting information and assessing the district's strengths and weaknesses. Board members and most administrators, teachers, parents, community leaders honestly shared the problems as they perceived them with Drake. Two major problems emerged: personnel and fiscal.

As the board had promised, a personnel move had been made in the above troubled school before Don's arrival.) Don created a second assistant superintendency (that of instruction), and hired him from outside the district. (Again, no problems from the board.) These two administrators became solid supporters and colleagues in Don's organization change efforts.

Don also informally set some norms for personnel behavior in successfully pressuring two teachers, two teacher assistants, and two classified employees to resign. One first-year teacher and a second teacher (new to the district) both had poor performance

evaluations. There were questions of moral turpitude about the TAs (although not in scandalous proportions).

His greatest managerial problem, however, was fiscal. RCPS had a $200,000 electrical utilities debt due to a 58% rate increase on 7/01/93. Also in the 1992-93 budget was $500,000 dollars in non-recurring funds which the schools would not have next year. Third, RCPS needed another $20,000,000 for renovation of existing buildings.

In December 1992 Don realized that the schools would have to go to the county commissioners for $800,000 for the 1993-94 budget, (Last year they had received $75,000.) "If we are not careful, everything we are doing this year [school improvement] will fall by the wayside if we run out of money" (3/31/93). In May 1993 RCPS received a sizable budget increase ($575,000)--the largest ever for this district and also received a commitment of $5,000,000 to convert an elementary school to a middle school.

How did Don and the board pull this off? Three tactics were employed. Don gathered data to convince commissioners of school needs: "We spent a lot of time with the county commissioners providing them and the general public with the information so no one would rattle their sabers (that they did not know about our needs for more money)." Second, Don saw to it that the various publics perceived the schools as a major gameplayer within the Richmond County infrastructure: "We made sure that no organization gave more to United Way than schools" (1/21/93).

Third, Don made visible appearances at meeting frequented by Richmond County politicians. "I'm aware of the reciprocity--I've got to be interested in what they're doing, if they are going to support me" (2/19/93). These meetings included the Chamber of Commerce, the Lions Club, the Rotary Club, and school functions, e.g., science fairs, PTA meetings. He was quick to see opportunities for collaboration with community organizations: "Can we plug in our OBE [Outcomes Based Education] plans for students in community service and somehow meet some needs of Chamber of Commerce" (3/02/93)? He helped form business partnerships with the Lions and Rotary clubs and made

presentations on defining OBE clearly and garnering support for the project. "I was on our TV channel to talk up our Forum and exit outcomes" (3/02/93).

Another managerial challenge was that of major board policy formulation, e.g., smoking in public places. By June 1993, Don and the board were over half way through this task. Last, but certainly not least, termites were discovered in the bus garage. Through cooperation of county commissioners RCPS put a successful bid on a building formerly owned by a bankrupt construction company for busses.

The investigator probed Don about the paucity of daily and weekly crises presumably confronting first-year superintendents. "We're all working together well. I also think that if something happened [an obvious case of neglect or incompetence], they know I'd nail their butts. I clearly communicated that expectation" (3/02/93). Given his personnel moves, such an expectation among RCPS personnel is certainly plausible.

Conceptualizing Two Visions for School Improvement

The above actions can be considered managerial; Don was responding to problems endemic to the district. The challenge of leadership (that of providing direction for improvement) remained on the front burner: Don's mission as change agent to a district with great potential for improvement. He had realized during his doctoral program during the late 1980s that schools had to change. Having conceptualized the problem (that of deep-seated organization change), Don continued to search for an answer. He read widely (often at five A.M.): Schlechty (Schools For the Twenty-First Century), Covey (Seven Habits of Highly Effective People), Lieberman (building professional cultures), and Senge (The Fifth Discipline). He then began conceptualizing his ideas in writing.

Don developed through his reflection on schooling two strong visions about improving schools. First, schools could not change unilaterally; they needed pressure to change.[2] Don identified two kinds of pressure. An internal pressure developed when teachers and principals realized a discrepancy between the now and the future): that schools as presently organized could not prepare

students for the Information World. Teachers and principals, through exchange of views with community leaders, must be the major players in school organization redesign. An external pressure emanated from public education customers (parents, students, community leaders) pressure for improvement. When teachers and principals were confronted with standards for their own customers; satisfaction, this pressure was more difficult to explain away (than that of the state education agency.)

Second, Don became convinced that the traditional workplace culture was not conducive to teacher professional growth, customer accountability, and work redesign: "If we don't have the new culture, then programs become cyclical [they don't last and are replaced by new ones]. We're working hard to determine what needs to be done to institutionalize conditions for change" (4/27/93).. Devolving the decisionmaking to personnel most directly affected by the decisions was inter-related to professionalizing work culture: "I don't have all the answers. I just have people around me who do. I'm not intimidated by bright, capable people" (6/22/93). He expected central office administrators, principals and teachers to make most of the decisions, especially since they then could be accountable for those decisions. "I don't make many decisions; everyone else makes them." "People don't understand power, which they equate with decisionmaking. I equate power with knowledge and helping people to make decisions" (3/02/93).

During February 1993 Don spent several days visiting with Phil Schlechty in Louisville, Kentucky. He then draw up a blueprint for action. This new culture had three pieces: structural, curriculum, and student quality work (identified by teacher work teams with the help of consultants). The structural culture necessitated changing roles, rules, relationships in schools, e.g., use of staffers to free up classroom teachers for curriculum planning. (At the high school the administrators and teachers were experimenting with a new schedule.) In the curriculum culture specialists can take the exit outcomes (developed through the OBE grant) and use task analysis and curriculum mapping). In student quality work teachers used

structured interviews with groups of 15 students; they then could identify indicators of quality work (from breaking down the exit outcomes into operable student objectives). [Instead of controlling students,] "What we need to focus on is developing quality work that students will engage in" (personal communication, 12/16/93). From these qualitative data teachers and administrators, for instance, found that students were more apt to do the work when they have the ability to collaborate with others (a strong justification for teaching cooperative learning skills).

These two visions were complementary. Ultimately only teachers and principals in the schools can change the teaching and learning processes. Regardless of the pressures exerted on schooling, however, teachers and principals could only change within an established collaborative culture.

Strategies Used To Implement Don's Visions

Visions merely residing inside one's head are one thing. Unless visions are capable of transforming an administrator's mindset and quality of decisionmaking, organizations, of course, change very little. (See Appendix A for an end-of-year letter mailed to all Richmond County personnel on setting the stage for organizational change.)

Don employed two general strategies in acting upon his visions for organizational change: 1) educating the public and 2) supporting and modeling collaborative patterns of interactions with his teachers and principals.

Educating The Public

When told of a superintendent who had been fired the night before, Don responded: "He [the former superintendent] had some great ideas, but he never learned how to deal with the public....You have to educate the public (after all they have kids in school and they are all 'education experts')....We [educators] just can't do whatever we want to do. You find out early if they don't like what you want to do" (9/02/93).

Here is where the OBE, four-year project played into Don's hands. For his biggest long term challenge was to build a

community-wide awareness of the need to change. The OBE initiative could be used as a much-needed focus and attention-getter. Building on the momentum established by the OBE project, Drake set up town forums in which teachers, parents, and business leaders developed exit outcomes as a community-school partnership. Drake describes his agenda regarding town forums:

> We involved the community in our exit outcomes project to build a partnership between the schools and community. The Town Forum developed exit outcomes.
>
> This partnership has had several advantages:
>
> 1) the exchange of views provides a subtle form of pressure, i.e., school personnel begin to sense that schools must become different organizations [if only because of community demands];
>
> 2) we provide various sources of information on <u>why</u> we need to change. We brought in William Dagget of New State Department of Education on changes in the workplace;
>
> 3) This grant also helps us in the state-level accountability program which appears to be shifting to a student-outcomes driven model. (5/20/93)

RCPS personnel also were putting together a video in which administrators, board members, parents, and community leaders visited a local plant whose operations had been streamlined by computers used to create a consolidated data base for product marketing. The purpose of this video: Richmond citizens needed to become aware of the need to teach different skills in schools of the rapid acceleration of change.

Don also was aware of the importance of communicating clearly with the various publics. "We always set up forums and task forces to get the citizens to understand why changes in public education are needed. They then begin saying the same things we believe in and yet it's now theirs" (9/02/93).

The following observation buttresses Don's priority for clear communication. Don and the investigator visited an elementary school whose principal had designed an innovative master schedule

in which classroom teachers had extended blocks (both within grade and across-grade) for collaborative planning with specialists. While eating lunch, Don asked the principal to explain her schedule. Don later reflected on her explanation: "That was the third time I heard this innovative scheduling and I still don't understand it. How are the parents going to understand it" (9/03/93)?

The chances for miscommunication, Don speculated, magnified with more devolution of decisionmaking to the schools. Don was observed receiving a phone call from a parent upset with the program objectives of the high school Wellness Center. "I'll bet the letter sent home [describing the program] wasn't clear enough. The parent probably thought teachers were distributing condoms." (9/03/93)[3]

Educating the community (partly through clear, simple communication) was an essential tool for a change agent and collaborative culture-builder in a small city/largely rural county in the Southeast. Careful use of these tools prevented Don from getting too far ahead of the pack: "We always set up forums and task forces to get the citizens to understand why changes in public education are needed. They then begin saying the same things we believe in and yet it's now theirs" (9/02/93). This strategy was useful with RCPS's <u>external</u> environment in building a supportive, aware, and receptive culture.

Below are discussed Don's strategy in building a collaborative culture <u>within</u> RCPS.

<u>Supporting and Modeling Collaborative Interaction Patterns With Teachers and Principals</u>

Several tactics were used to begin transforming the school work culture from a hierarchical to a collegial model. Don and the assistant superintendent for instruction started a reading group of about 50 members (teachers, administrators, teachers, board members, community leaders) who read Covey, Schlectly, and other authors to begin asking questions about the need to transform work culture.

Second, they helped principals establish school planning and shared decisionmaking teams, and provided the autonomy from the central office necessary for SBM. Don and the ASI conducted two-day workshops on changing expectations among central office administrators, principals, and teachers. Schools were given large chunks of money, e.g., OBE, Chapter 1, to make their own decisions free of central office interference.

Third, central office administrators encouraged ways for specialists to collaborate with classroom teachers. In elementary schools, for example, teachers and principals were examining ways for music, physical education, art, and Spanish teachers to plan integrated curricular units with classroom teachers. Fourth, RCPS personnel were linking staff development to the district goal of SBM. They established a technology center and provided competitive mini-grants to encourage teacher innovation.

Don set and modeled expectations both with district and building-level administrators and with teachers. He established an annual, reciprocal evaluation process. Teachers should have some say in how their principals were doing. Principals should have opportunity to evaluate their supervisors (including the superintendent). In setting a new value structure for eventual SBM implementation, Don began moving toward a growth orientation, teacher-empowerment model. He brought in consultants and developed a district-wide maintenance plan (including community teams rating their schools for cleanliness). Long-range, be began setting up a differentiated pay plan to reward risk-taking (setting a new norm for a learning organization) and developing a comprehensive planning and improvement process to complement the OBE initiative. (The ASI had been hired partly to help on instructional assessment.)

Don reflected on the process of changing interaction patterns with teachers and principals:

> For example, teachers at one school called me out there and wanted me to tell them what regarding signing waivers for differentiated pay. We had quite a scene because they have never been able to

make these decisions before. Now that it's "nitty gritty," they are unsure whether they want to be doing these things. "I find myself playing the linker--here's what they are doing in so-and-so school, call them. (2/19/93)

I just get other people involved in making decisions. For example I just asked the principals to make a lot of decisions; in our district we have principals and teachers making decisions about thousands of dollars. (2/19/93)

I had one principal most upset about a decision made; I asked her--Why didn't you say something? You were at the meeting for two hours. (6/22/93)

These two strategies (educating the people and supporting and modeling collaborative interaction patterns with principals and teachers) strongly implies that Don's actions taken were grounded in his visions. He could "practice what he preached" because he had thought out what had to be done (an agenda for action) and then provided consistent support for such an agenda. "The most important thing I have done is develop a planning process for schools and the district" (personal communication, 12/16/93).

Summary and Conclusion

Don's extensive administrative experience enabled him to make the managerial moves that set the tone for long-term school improvement. Based upon a careful assessment of RCPS and the community, Don made some deliberate personnel moves (e.g., advocating replacement of a principal, hiring an ASI, resignation of six teachers and staffers). He also provided fiscal management by working with the board to establish a long-term facilities policy and by "politicking" with local community groups to receive a $575,000 1993-94 budget increase.

He then could begin exploiting other contextual factors (board commitment, economic growth, and the OBE grant) to provide the much-needed leadership. The board kept their promise not to micro-manage and provided consistent support for Don's exertion of

internal pressure within schools, e.g., teacher-student curricular design groups. "We are one solid group now: 'What gets down on paper gets tested'" (1/21/93). The board's support appeared connected to business pressure (the press for economic growth) for school improvement. Provided the schools made substantial progress toward instructional improvement, board members might have received commensurably less pressure to micro-manage. Continual reading and writing had confirmed for Don that schools needed both external and internal pressure for change (his first vision). The OBE grant provided some commitment-to-change and community focus for external pressure, e.g., task forces on identifying student outcomes. Again, his extensive administrative experience provided skills both in educating the public and in providing clear, simple communication.

Don implemented his second vision (the need to change school workplace culture) largely by supporting teachers and principals, e.g., staff development in team building skills, and modeling the collegial interactions prerequisite for a collaborative culture, e.g., site-based management and shared decisionmaking: He practiced what he preached. An analysis of his time spent helps illuminate his administrative practice.[4] The budget consumed Don's time for the entire year (26%). Within-district meetings (22%), change facilitation (16%), and meetings with various publics (13%) comprised 51% of his time and confirms Don's strategy to educate the public about needed changes. Evaluation of staff (3%) demonstrated a relatively low priority <u>across the entire year</u> for managerial practice (most of which was done during the first few months of his tenure).

In conclusion, Don appeared to be a good match among context, person, and change strategies. The board support for school improvement (and some deft personnel moves), the potential for economic growth (and the resulting community press for new student skills required for information age workplaces), and the OBE grant were <u>contextual</u> factors on which Don could capitalize. RCPS represented a lateral move for Don--given his considerable administrative experience--and his visions (twin needs for

pressure-for-change and collegial school work culture) was a good personal fit both with the district context and with his strategies (educating the public and setting collaborative interaction patterns with principals and teachers).[5]

Discussion and Theory Building

Four extant theories can be used in extending and grounding findings from this case study. First, Don's administrative experience was crucial to a successful first year. Such a finding is confirmed by the study of career paths of exemplary superintendents (Carter, Glass, & Hord, 1993, cited by Chapman, 1993, p. 10): "The exemplary superintendents were far more likely to spend a few years in central office positions before acquiring appointments as superintendents." Don's administrative experience enabled him to make decisive, managerial moves early during his first year, e.g., appointment of new junior high principal (October 1992), that set a norm of professional accountability throughout the district.

Second, Don's definition of use of power (providing knowledge and helping people make decisions) and tactics (e.g., staff development for team building, devolution of decisionmaking to building level), approximates the facilitative power of Dunlap and Goldman (1990): power not as dominance over someone but as exercised through another: "...where learning and problem-solving are mutual and are negotiated on the basis of collegial, reciprocal norms" (p. 8). Power as facilitation, according to these authors: a) decentralizes and enlarges the decision-making process by encouraging involvement by more actors; b) encourages solutions as a function of actors and not as a function of a bureaucratic system; and c) reduces the degree to which administrators are perceived as comprising the "visible centers of schools" (p. 22).

Third, starting with his doctoral program (1981), Don's reading and writing relates to the need for administrator intellectual and moral development (Pitner, 1987): studying socio-intellectual history and psychology and philosophy of education to establish an ideological discrepancy between the

status quo and how things should be. Don's two-part vision was grounded in his strategy for professional identity in which he used his reading and writing to base his administrative actions, (e.g., shared decisionmaking, building collaborative relationships). The stronger his professional identity, the more inclined he became to devolve decision making to others who could benefit from this opportunity. Drake, in empowering himself intellectually, then could empower others more directly involved in teaching and learning. (See Appendix B for his suggestions in improving preparation programs for superintendents.

Last, Don's administrative actions taken provide an interesting variation of the initiating structure and consideration theory of Halpin (1966). Don's "structure" was only unilateral during the first several months (generally regarding personnel) and then shifted to a set of three mental images about revitalizing school work culture (structural, curriculum, and student work). His "consideration" included not only traditional qualities of empathy and human relations skills but also a clear sense that administrators needed encouragement for a new mind set, e.g., empowering teachers, sharing formulation of student outcomes with parents and community leaders, the need for clear, simple communication with parents. As observed in administrative actions of beginning principals (e.g., Achilles, Keedy, & High, 1994), managerial structure-setting often may <u>precede</u> widescale use of consideration--instead of structure setting and consideration being simultaneous processes.

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Endnotes

[1]One incident is useful in demonstrating active board support. In April 1993 (when spirits were low because of budgetary problems and teachers and principals exhausted from team meetings on curriculum and shared decisionmaking), the board members held a surprise wine-and-cheese get-together for all RCPS personnel at the local Coast Guard station. All the board members dressed up with wigs, etc., and sang Sixties music (thereby modeling risk taking). Awards were presented for outstanding school-based planning teams. Don commented upon the fundamental motives of his board: "They are serving on the board because they care about kids" (4/27/93).

[2]Goodlad (1984, p. 269) observes: "Schools do not take on emphases unless they receive rather clear messages to the effect that these emphases are wanted. Then they respond, over time, with varying degrees of effectiveness. There is, at present, no strong pressure to change the ways schools conduct the business of schooling." Apparently, Don had a clear understanding of the ecology of schooling.

[3]Don received a phone call from a middle school principal who had received parental complaints that teachers were teaching science without textbooks. "We didn't educate the public enough about the need to change how we teach [toward student self-directed learning]" (9/03/93). As a second example, Don received another phone call from an elementary school principal whose teachers were without math texts. "Now that schools are responsible for textbook ordering, she has to set up her own system so she knows what's going on" (9/03/93).

[4]The mean percentages in how Don used his time were as follows: within-district meetings (22%); budget-related (26%); communicating w/ board members (12%); outside district meetings (8%); change facilitation (16%); evaluating staff (3%); and meetings w/ various publics (13%). (Categories were derived substantively, i.e., grounded in the study data. Percentages represent averages across the nine interviews.)

[5]See Moore and Verre (1993) for use of an across-case analysis of three superintendents and their assertion that school reform is most likely to occur when there is a good match among district context, strategies, and the person (Do their actions confirm their publicized pronouncements about school reform?).

Appendix A

May 28, 1993

Dear Folks:

... What I think we have been about this past year is significantly different from past initiatives [in Richmond County]. For the first time we have had the financial resources and the vision to build a system that will sustain change at the district level.... As we continue to work together over the next several years it is important that we continue to build this system of support, or this initiative, like all the rest, will collapse under its own weight. I believe there are nine imperatives if a district is going to support change initiatives. The first is developing a shared understanding of the problem.... Second, create a shared vision.... Third, focus all school activities on students.... Fourth, create a results-oriented management system.... Fifth, ensure a pattern of participatory leadership.... Sixth, foster flexibility in the use of time, people, space, knowledge, and technology.... Seventh, encourage innovation.... Eighth, provide for continuity.... Ninth, foster collaboration. We have developed a planning process which, while allowing for schools to be different, ensures that we are all connected.... As a result we have made progress toward becoming a district-wide team focused on results. At the school level conversations have begun across grades and disciplines. We need to continue to build our professionalism through sharing and expanding our knowledge and expertise in a collaborative setting....

Sincerely,

Don Drake, EdD